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Second Part of GCOB Justification for Continental Shelf Legislation

REF:

NASSAU 1627 CUB

Attached is a copy of the second of three articles, prepared by the GCOB Government Information Services, seeking to justify the recent legislation authorizing the Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries to declare certain species creatures of the Bahamian continental shelf. The first article was reported RefTel and the third will be forwarded to the Department when it appears in the local media.

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Article in Nassau Guardian,
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Enclosure No. 1
NASSAU A-258

NASSAU *Continued*
15/74

New Law 'Greatest Thing' For Local Fishing Industry

(EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the second in a series of three articles on the Bahamas Information Services on the lobster and its importance to The Bahamas economy.)

Bahamian fishermen in the Family Islands are rejoicing over the Government's decision to protect the crawfish industry from ruthless exploitation by Cuban fishermen based in the United States.

Reports reaching Nassau indicate that legislation recently passed by Parliament providing for the exercise of sovereign rights over the resources of the Continental Shelf of The Bahamas has been widely acclaimed as "the greatest thing that has happened to the fishing industry in the Bahamas."

They predict a phenomenal increase in the number of lobster tails exported from the United States in 1975, as well as a greater supply for local consumption.

Richard W. Beales, Fisheries Officer at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Local Government has confirmed that there has been a considerable increase in interest in the fishery by Bahamian fishermen over the past 18 months, with new vessels and new processing facilities entering the industry.

Mr. Beales believes that the recent amendment to the regulations permitting Bahamian fishermen to use traps for the capture of crawfish, now means that Bahamians can exploit the deeper waters of the banks and can continue fishing during adverse weather.

At the present time Government has no control over the resources of the Bahamas Banks. Bahamian fishermen are subject to conservation regulations of the Bahamas within the 12-mile exclusive fishing zone, whereas beyond the 12-mile limit, foreign fishermen have been able to fish throughout the year, including during the Florida closed season, and are known to have taken large quantities of undersized and egg-bearing animals for which markets can be readily found in the United States.

Crawfish outside the 12-mile limit are the same as those found within the limit, consequently, the Government's decision to declare the spiny lobster a creature of the Continental Shelf of the Bahamas is clearly in the long-term best interest of both the crawfish stocks, and the Bahamian fishermen.

Because of a lack of complete statistical coverage for the Bahamas, some difficulty is encountered when trying to assess the true value of the crawfish industry to the Bahamian economy. Data, however, are available for all landings made in Nassau and for all exports made from Nassau.

In the first open season in August, over 670,000 lbs. of crawfish have been exported to the United States, from which the Fisheries Ministry receives an export fee of three cents per pound. Fifty-six export licenses have been issued for 1974-75.

A conservative estimate of the value of the crawfish resources in terms of production during 1973 has been put at \$3½ million. This is said to be less than half of what was taken off the Bahamas Banks by foreign fishermen during the same period.

It is the policy of the Bahamas Government to encourage fishermen to sell their catch within

the Bahamas where it can be processed and packaged before being exported as a "Produce of the Bahamas."

The processing side of the industry, therefore, helps to provide on-shore employment for many Bahamians. Processing plants are presently located on several of the Family Islands as well as in New Providence and Grand Bahama.

Cuban fishermen based in Florida are today considered a threat to the Bahamas lobster industry.

Seven years ago fishermen out of Florida harvested about two-thirds in Florida waters and one-third from the continental shelf of the Bahamas. Now more than twice as many of Florida lobster landings comes from the continental shelves of the Bahamas.

In an article written in 1972 by Andreas Holmsen, Professor of Resources Economics, Mr. Holmsen frankly admitted that "the United States gets much of its catch from the Bahamas ground." During 1972, 1,149 Florida-based fishermen, 250 boats and 272 vessels were involved in the spiny lobster fishery in Florida. For 1974 when the count is tabulated the figures are expected to increase by at least 25 per cent.

According to a National Marine Fisheries Service report, during the years 1964 to 1973, approximately 42,000,000 lbs. of lobster were caught in Florida waters, compared with over 13,000 lbs. caught in "other waters" (Bahamian).

An interesting aspect of these figures is the fact that in 1964 just over 2,600,000 lbs. of crawfish were caught by Florida-based fishermen in Florida waters, against 1,000,000 lbs. taken in "other waters" (Bahamian), while in 1972, 4,790,000 lbs. of crawfish were taken in Florida waters as against 6,677,000 lbs. taken in Bahamian waters.

This marked a change between 1964 and 1972 is sufficient to show that the Bahamas Banks are being exploited at a rate which must be detrimental to the Bahamian lobster stock.

It is hoped that the statistics which led Robert F. Kennedy to declare the American Lobster Act recently signed into law has an effect in designating the American Lobster as a creature of the United States continental shelf. I hope this law does not include the spiny lobster or give reason for our neighbouring countries to do the same, as our international fishing grounds are other nation's continental shelves.

"Until about seven years ago, both the United States and the Bahamas had a three-mile fishing limit; then we changed to 12 miles and the following year the Bahamas followed suit. Our Government needs to try again to get the Bahamas Government to give back our traditional 3½ mile fishing rights that have existed with continuity for many years, possibly with each vessel paying a license or fee for the purpose of both crawfish and scale fishing."

The Bahamas Government's answer to Mr. Felix's absurd suggestion is the enactment of legislation by Parliament declaring once and for all times its sovereign rights over the continental shelf of the Bahamas.

It was this timely action on the part of the Government of The Bahamas that has brought about such wide-spread approval from fishermen in New Providence and throughout the Family Islands.